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Choosing Safe Toys

Toys are a fun and important part of every child's development. But each year, many kids are treated in hospital emergency departments for toy-related injuries. Choking is a risk for kids ages 3 or younger, because they tend to put objects in their mouths.

Manufacturers follow guidelines and label most new toys for specific age groups. But the most important thing a parent can do — especially when it comes to younger children — is to supervise play.

Toy Guidelines

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) closely monitors and regulates toys. Any toys made in — or imported into — the United States after 1995 must follow CPSC standards.

Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when shopping for toys:

- Toys made of fabric should be labeled as flame resistant or flame retardant.

- Stuffed toys should be washable.

- Painted toys must use lead-free paint.

- Art materials should say nontoxic.

- Crayons and paints should say ASTM D-4236 on the package, which means that they've been evaluated by the American Society for Testing and Materials.

Steer clear of older toys, even hand-me-downs from friends and family. These might not meet current safety standards.

And make sure a toy isn't too loud for your child. The noise of some rattles, squeak toys, and musical or electronic toys can be as loud as a car horn — even louder if a child holds it directly to the ears — and can damage hearing.

The Right Toys at the Right Ages

Always read labels to make sure a toy is right for a child's age. Guidelines published by the CPSC and other groups can help you make those buying decisions.

Be sure to consider your child's temperament, habits, and behavior whenever you buy a new toy. Even a child who seems advanced compared with other kids the same age shouldn't use toys meant for older kids. The age levels for toys are determined by safety factors, not intelligence or maturity.

Read more about choosing safe toys:
- for Babies
- for Toddlers and Preschoolers
- for School-Age Kids

Keeping Toys Safe at Home

After you've bought safe toys, it's also important to make sure kids know how to use them. The best way to do this is by supervising kids as they play. This teaches kids how to play safely while having fun.

Parents should:

- Teach kids to put toys away.

- Check toys regularly to make sure that they aren't broken or unusable:
    - Wooden toys shouldn't have splinters.

    - Bikes and outdoor toys shouldn't have rust.

- - Stuffed toys shouldn't have broken seams or exposed removable parts.

- Throw away broken toys or repair them right away.

- Store outdoor toys when they're not in use so that they are not exposed to rain or snow.

And be sure to keep toys clean. Some plastic toys can be cleaned in the dishwasher, but read the manufacturer's directions first. Another option is to mix antibacterial soap or a mild dishwashing detergent with hot water in a spray bottle and use it to clean toys, rinsing them afterward.

Reporting Unsafe Toys
Check the CPSC website for the latest information about toy recalls or call their hotline at (800) 638-CPSC to report a toy you think is unsafe. If you have any doubt about a toy's safety, err on the side of caution and do not allow your child to play with it.

Reviewed by: Kate M. Cronan, MD
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